

George Washington Papers, Series 3, Subseries 3F, Varick Transcripts, Letterbook 1

***To THE MAJOR AND BRIGADIER GENERALS⁴⁷**

Camp at Cambridge, September 8, 1775.

Gentlemen: As I mean to call upon you in a day or two for your opinions upon a point of a very Interesting nature to the well being of the Continent in general, and this Colony in particular; I think it proper, indeed an incumbent duty on me previous to this meeting, to intimate to the end and design of it, that you may have time to consider the matter with that deliberation and attention which the Importance of it requires.

It is to know whether, in your judgment, we cannot make a successful attack upon the Troops in Boston, by means of Boats, cooperated by an attempt upon their Lines at Roxbury. The success of such an Enterprize depends, I well know, upon the

47. Maj. Gens. Artemas Ward, Charles Lee, and Israel Putnam; Brig. Gens. John Thomas, Joseph Spencer, William Heath, John Sullivan, Nathanael Greene, and Horatio Gates.

all wise disposer of Events, and is not within the reach of human wisdom to foretell the Issue; but, if the prospect is fair, the undertaking is justifiable under the following, among other reasons which might be assigned.

The Season is now fast approaching when warm, and comfortable Barracks must be erected for the Security of the Troops, against the inclemency of the Winter; large and costly provision must be made in the article of Wood, for the Supply of the Army; and after all that can be done in this way, it is but too probable that Fences, Woods, Orchards, and even Houses themselves, will fall Sacrifices to the want of Fuel, before the end of the Winter. A very considerable difficulty, if not

expençe, must accrue on acct. of Cloathing for the Men now ingaged in the Service, and if they do not enlist again, this difficulty will be Increased to an almost insurmountable degree. Blankets I am inform'd are now much wanted, and not to be got, how then shall we be able to keep Soldiers to their duty, already impatient to get home, when they come to feel the Severity of Winter without proper Covering? If this Army should not Incline to engage for a longer term than the first of January, what then is to be the consequence, but that you must either be obliged to levy new Troops and thereby have two Setts (or partly so) in pay at the same time, or, by disbanding one set before you get the other, expose the Country to desolation, and the Cause perhaps to irretrievable Ruin. These things are not unknown to the Enemy, perhaps it is the very ground they are building on, if they are not waiting a

reinforcement; and if they are waiting for succours, ought it not to give a Spur to the attempt? Our Powder (not much of which would be consumed in such an enterprize) without any certainty of Supply, is daily wasting. and to sum up the whole, in spite of every saving that can be made, the expence of supporting this Army will so far exceed any Idea that was form'd in Congress of it, that I do not know what will be the consequences.

These among many other reasons which might be assigned, induce me to wish a speedy finish of the dispute; but, to avoid these evils we are not to loose sight of the difficulties, the hazard, and the loss that may accompany the attempt, nor, what will be the probable consequences of a failure.

That every circumstance for and against this measure may be duely weighted, that there may be time for doing of it, and nothing of this Importance resolved on but after mature deliberation, I give this previous notice of the Intention of calling you together on Monday next, at Nine o'clock, at which time you are requested to attend at head Quarters. It is unnecessary I am perswaded, to recommend Secrecy, as the Success of the Enterprize, (if undertaken) must depend in a great measure upon the suddenness of the stroke. I am with the greatest esteem, etc.⁴⁸

[MS.H.S.]

48. The council of war met (September 11) and decided against the attempt. Sir William Howe wrote to Governor Legge, of Nova Scotia (September 4) in explanation of the British inactivity: "The situation of the king's troops and that of the rebels is nearly the same as when I had the honor of writing you last. They are entrenched upon every advantageous spot, and we are so strongly posted here that we wish to tempt them to attack us, which if they do not shortly do, perhaps we may try our fortune against them; but we are so well prepared upon these heights [Charlestown] that it would be imprudent to attack them before we give up their coming to us."

***To THE GENERAL OFFICERS**

Headquarters, Cambridge, October 5, 1775.

Sir: In a Letter from the Congress, dated 26th September, Information on the following points is required¹⁶ :

What number of men are sufficient for a Winters Campaign?

Can the pay of the Privates be reduced and how much?

What Rations should be allowed the Men?

What Regulations are further necessary for the Government of the Forces?

16. Washington submitted these queries, in writing, to the council of general officers on October 8. To the ration allowance query he added: "and for such small Articles as the Commissary at times cannot furnish, shall they be compensated in money or Provisions?" The council decided (October 8): First. Unanimously that the Army ought not to consist of less than 20,372 men, to be formed into 26 regiments (exclusive of riflemen and artillery); each regiment to consist of 728 men, officers included; each company to be officered with 1 captain, 2 lieutenants, 1 ensign, and to contain 4 sergeants, 4 corporals, 2 drums or fifes, and 76 privates. This army was deemed sufficient for offensive and defensive measures. Second. That the pay can not be reduced at present, the

present allowance of provisions should stand, and compensation in money should be allowed for such articles as the commissary could not furnish. Third. The men should be engaged to Dec. 1, 1776, but to be sooner discharged if necessary. Fourth. That each general officer should clothe a man according to his own fancy and judgment, and a selection to be made from these models, the clothing to be supplied by the Continent and paid for by stoppages of to per cent per month. Fifth. As to manner of paying the troops the council was equally divided; Washington, Greene, Sullivan, Heath, and Lee were in favor of monthly payments, and Gates, Spencer, Thomas, Putnam, and Ward of payments every three months. On the questions of regulating the forces and the selection of officers more time was requested. An additional query was laid before the meeting: "Whether it will be advisable to enlist any negroes in the new army? or whether there be a distinction between such as are slaves and those that are free? Agreed unanimously, to reject all slaves, and, by a great majority, to reject negroes altogether." The letter of Congress of the 26th and the original proceedings of the council are in the *Washington Papers*.

To the above queries of the Congress, I have to add several of my own, which I also request your Opinion upon viz.:—

For how long a time ought the Men in the present Army (should we set about enlisting them) be Engaged?

What method would you recommend, as most eligible to Cloath a new raised Army with a degree of Decency and regularity? Would you advise it to be done by the Continent? In that case would you lower the Men's Wages, and make no deduction for Cloathing, or let it stand, and make stoppages? and how much a month?

As there appears to be great irregularity in the manner of paying the Men, and much discontent has prevailed on that accot. in what manner, and at what fixed period would you advise it to be done under a new Establishment?

What sized Regiments would you recommend under this Establishment; that is, how many men to a Company? how many Companies to a Regiment; and how officered?

Is there any method by which the best of the present officers in this Army can be chosen, without impeding the Inlistment of the Men, by such choice, and preference. Under any compleat establishment, even if all the Privates in the Army were engaged again, many of the present Officers must be discharged, as there is an overproportion; of course we ought to retain the best.

Your close attention to the foregoing points against Monday

Ten o'clock, at which time I shall expect to see you at this place, will much oblige, Sir, &c.

REASONS OF COUNCIL OF WAR FOR EVACUATING LONG ISLAND

1st. Because Our advanced party had met with a defeat,

& the wood was lost, where we expected to make a principal Stand.

2nd. The great loss sustained in the death or Captivity of Several valuable Officers and their Battallions, or a large part of them, has occasioned great confusion and discouragement among the Troops.

3rd. The Heavy rains which fell Two days and Nights with but Little Intermission have Injured the Arms and Spoiled a great part of the Ammunition, and the Soldiery being without Cover and obliged to lay in the Lines, were worn out, and It was to be feared would not be retained in them by any Order.

4th. From the Time the Enemy moved from Flatbush, Several large Ships had attempted to get up as Supposed into the East River to cut off our Communication by which the whole Army would have been destroyed. But the wind being N. E. could not effect It.

5th. Upon consulting with persons of knowledge of the Harbour, they were of Opinion that Small Ships might come between Long Island and Governors Island where there are no obstructions and which would cut off the communication effectually, and who were also of Opinion the Hulks sunk, between Governor's Island, and the City of New York, were no sufficient Security for obstructing that passage.

6th. Tho' our Lines were fortified with some strong Redoubts, yet a Great part of them were weak being only abbattied with Brush, and affording no strong cover, so that there was reason to apprehend they might be forced, which would have put our Troops in confusion, and having no retreat, they must have been cut to pieces, or made prisoners.

7th. The Divided state of the Troops rendered our defence very precarious, and the duty of defending long and extensive Lines, at so many different places, without proper conveniences and cover so very fatiguing, that the Troops have become dispirited by their Incessant duty and watching.

8th. Because the enemy had sent several ships of war into the sound, to a place called flushing bay, and from the information received, that a part of their troops, were moving across long island, that way, there was reason to apprehend, they meant to pass overland, and form an incampment above King's bridge, in order to cut off, and prevent all communication between our army and the country beyond them or to get in our rear.

COUNCIL OF WAR

Head Quarters, Middle Brook, June 12, 1777.

His Excellency the Commander in Chief, informed the Council, that from various intelligence and many concurring circumstances, it was evident, General Howe had collected nearly the whole of his force at Brunswick in Jersey. That it appeared to him beyond doubt, that General Howe, has one of two objects in view, either the defeat of the Army under his immediate Command, or to possess

himself of Philadelphia. He stated the importance of the Highland passes and of the fortifications on the North River, in and contiguous to the Highlands. And then proposed the following Questions.

Will it be expedient in the present conjuncture of things, and from the information received, to draw any and what part of the Troops stationed at Peekskill near the Highlands, to reinforce this Army ?

Will it not be necessary to post Troops at Morris Town, to preserve it as a post of Communication? If it will, what number of Men should be stationed there?

What will be the best mode of promotion of Field and other (inferior) Officers in the Army?³⁵

35. The minutes of the council are in the writing of Robert Hanson Harrison. The decisions were: To draw all but 1,000 men from Peekskill; to maintain Morristown with Butlet's Connecticut detachment and the two independent Wyoming companies; to promote regimentally below the rank of major and in State lines above that rank, but in cases of particular merit to disregard this general rule.

On June 12 Harrison wrote to Major General Sullivan: "I have it in command to inform you that in a Council of General Officers held this Evening, among other points, your Situation was taken into consideration. After the matter was viewed and examined by the maps of the Country &ca. It was concluded by the Board, that you do not appear to be so secure at your present post as could be wished. Many reasons were urged or rather suggested, tending to shew, that the Enemy might attempt to get on your left and effect it. As such an event would probably be attended with injurious, not to say fatal consequences, the Council advise, 'that you take post on the high Grounds of Rocky Hill near the Bridge at the two Mills over Millstone, called the Rocky Hill Bridge,' unless you are certain, that you can always make a safe and secure retreat towards the Mountains from where you are. It appeared to them on consideration of the matter, that the Post advised will have every advantage, which your present has, without being subject to the same inconveniences. From that you will be as well able to cover the Road, leading immediately from the Bridge to Penny Town, and also will be secure in your retreat to join the main body of the Army."

Sullivan was reminded also that he was not to risk a general action, but to harass and retard the march of the British. Acting only as light troops, his artillery was not to be brought into action but withdrawn at once on the British advance. Sullivan was also to “prevail upon the well affected part of the Inhabitants” to bring intelligence to Washington continually, after the British start to move. Harrison's letter is in the *Washington Papers*.

COUNCIL OF WAR

At a Council of General Officers, held at Neshamini Camp, in Bucks County, August 21, 1777.

The Commander in Chief informed the Council that the British Fleet left the Capes of Delaware on the 31st. of July and have not been seen, from any information he has obtained, since the 7th. inst. when they were off Senapuxon and steering to the Southward, and propounded the following Questions for the Opinion of the Council.

1st. What is the most probable place of their destination, whether Eastward or Southward and to what part?

2. If it should be thought, from a consideration of all circumstances, that the Fleet is gone far to the Southward, will it be adviseable for this Army, taking into view the length of distance and unhealthiness of that Climate

at this Season, to march that way? or will there be a probability of their arriving there in Time, should it be attempted, to give any effectual opposition to the Enemy, or to prevent them accomplishing their purposes?

3d. If it should not be thought advisable in such case for the Army to march to the Southward, How shall it be employed? Shall it remain where it now is, or move towards Hudsons River to act as the situation of Affairs shall seem to require?⁶⁶

66. The council decided unanimously that Charleston was the most probable destination of the British Fleet; that the army could not possibly arrive at Charleston in time to afford any aid' and that it should move immediately towards the North River. The officers in council were: The Commander in Chief, Greene, Stirling, Stephen, Lafayette, Maxwell, Knox, Wayne, Muhlenberg, Weedon, Woodford, Scott, and Conway.

COUNCIL OF WAR

Camp near Potts Grove, September 23, 1777.

His Excellency informed the General Officers, that the Reason of his calling them together was to acquaint them that the Enemy had, the preceeding night, crossed the Schuylkill by several Fords about twelve Miles below and by the best accounts were proceeding towards Philadelphia. He also informed them, that the Troops under Generals Smallwood and Wayne had not yet rejoined the Army and that a Brigade of Continental Troops under the Command of General McDougall might be expected in a few days from Peekskill and about one thousand Militia from Jersey under General Dickinson in the same time. He therefore desired the opinion of the Council, whether it would be most advisable to advance upon the Enemy with our present force, or wait till the Reinforcements and detachments above mentioned should come in?

Previous to taking the Voices upon the foregoing Question, His Excellency begged leave to inform the Council, of the present state of the Army and the Reasons which has induced him to make the late Movements, which (tho' well known to most of them), were not so fully to Major Genl. Armstrong and Brig: Genl. Potter who had been detached from the Main Body of the Army. This being agreed to, His Excellency proceeded to inform the Council: That when the Army left Germantown upon the 15th. instant it was a determination to meet the Enemy and give them Battle whenever a convenient opportunity should be found; that they advanced the same day to the Sign of the Buck and the day following to the Warren Tavern upon the Lancaster Road. On the 17th. in the morning

intelligence was brought that the Enemy were advancing, upon which the Army were paraded and a disposition made to receive them, the Pickets had exchanged a few shots when a violent Storm of Rain, which continued all the day and the following Night, prevented all further operations. Upon an examination of the Arms and Ammunition on the 18th: it was found that the former were much impaired and all the latter, that was in Cartouch Boxes, was intirely ruined, wherefore it was judged expedient to with draw the Army to some place of security, until the Arms could be repaired and the Ammunition recruited. Before this could be fully effected, advice was received that the Enemy had quitted their former position near the White Horse Tavern and were marching down the Road leading to the Swedes Ford; but the Army not being in a condition to attack them, owing to the want of Ammunition, it was judged most prudent to cross the River at Parker's Ford and take post in the Rear of the Fatland Ford opposite to the Enemy. In this position the Armies continued for two days when on the 20th: instant that of the Enemy appeared to be in motion, and from our own observation and the accounts of our reconnoitering parties, were marching rapidly up the Reading Road; this induced us to move up likewise, to hinder them from crossing above us and by getting between us and Reading, take an opportunity of destroying a large collection of military Stores deposited there. On the Night of the 20th. the Army decamped and marched up to the Trap and on the 21st. to within four Miles of Potts Grove, the Enemy's Van then being at

French Creek upon the West side of Schuylkill. In the Night of the 22d. advice was received that the Enemy had crossed Schuylkill at Gordon's Ford below us, but the account was again contradicted; but in the Morning of the 23d., certain accounts came to hand that they really had crossed in large Numbers and were moving towards Philadelphia. His Excellency further informed the Council that the Troops were in no condition to make a forced March, as many of them were barefooted and all excessively harrassed with their great Fatigue. The Question being then put, the Council were unanimously of opinion. That, from the present state of the Army it would not be adviseable to advance upon the Enemy, but remain upon this ground or in the Neighbourhood, till the detachments and expected Reinforcements come up.⁷⁴

COUNCIL OF WAR

Head Quarters at Pennibeckers Mill, September 28, 1777.

74. The proceedings are in the writing of Tench Tilghman. In addition to Major Generals Sullivan, Greene, Stirling, Stephen, and Armstrong and Brigadier Generals Knox, Weedon, Nash, Scott, Conway, and Potter; Maj. Gen. Arthur St. Clair and John Cadwalader were present. The proceedings are not signed. The council unanimously decided that until McDougall, Dickinson, Wayne, and Smallwood joined the army, with their troops, it would not be prudent to move nearer the enemy. In the Force Transcripts (*Continental Army Returns*, 31, 97), in the Library of Congress, is another record of this council which varies considerably in text, but not in sense, from the above. The original of this is, presumably, in the Adjutant General's Office. War Department.

His Excellency informed the Board, that the Main body of the Enemy, by the last accounts he had obtained, lay near German Town, and that part had marched into the City of Philadelphia; Whether to remain there or not he could not learn. That their whole force, from the best accounts he could get and from a comparative view and estimate, amount to about 8,000 Men.

That a detachment of Continental Troops from Peekskill, under the Command of Brigr. Genl. McDougall, consisting of about 900 Men, had joined the Army; That Genl. Smallwood with the Militia of Maryland, amounting to about 1100, had also arrived; and that Brigadier Forman, with about 600 Jersey Militia, would be near the Army to day on the Skippack Road. That of Continental Troops at this time in Camp, exclusive of the Detachment under Genl. McDougall and that under Genl. Wayne at the Trap, there were returned present fit for duty 5,472, to which is to be added the light Corps lately under Genl. Maxwell, supposed to amount to 450 Men, and the Militia of the State of Pennsylvania under the Command of Major Genl. Armstrong. That upon the whole, the Army would consist of about 8000 Continental Troops rank and file, and 3000 Militia.

His Excellency further informed the Board, that a Body of Militia was coming from Virginia and that part had arrived at Lancaster. That he understood from Report, that the number of them amounted to near 2000 Men; but, that from good authority, he was advised they were badly armed and many

of them without any at all.

His Excellency also informed the Board, that on the 24th. Inst. he dispatched an Express to Genl. Putnam, with a Letter dated the day before, ordering a Detachment to be sent immediately from Peek's Kill to reinforce the Army under his Command; which Detachment, in addition to the Corps then on the March under Genl. McDougall, should make the Whole Force directed from that Post, amount to 2500 Effective Rank and file.

Under these circumstances he had called a Council of War to consult and resolve on the most advisable measures to be pursued; but more especially to learn from them, whether with this Force it was prudent to make a general and vigorous attack upon the Enemy, or to wait further reinforcements, upon which he prayed their Opinions.

The Board having taken into consideration the Whole circumstances and the Question propounded, are of opinion, that an immediate Attack should not be made; But they advise that the Army should move to some Grounds proper for an Encampment within about 12 Miles of the Enemy, and there wait for a further reinforcement, or be in readiness to take advantage of any favourable Opportunity that may offer for making an Attack.⁸⁹

Alexr. McDougall

H. Knox

F. Hash

P. Muhlenberg

T. Conway

Jno. Sullivan

Nathl. Greene

Stirling

Adam Stephen

John Armstrong

The subscribers being of opinion our force was sufficient to attack with; but being overuled concur with the above.

W. Smallwood

Jas. Irvine

Anthy. Wayne

Chs. Scott

Jas. Potter

89. The proceedings are in the writing of Robert Hanson Harrison. John Cadwalader and Joseph Reed took part in the council but did not sign the proceedings.

*** CIRCULAR TO THE GENERAL OFFICERS**

Head Quarters, October 26, 1777

Sir: You will, very shortly, be called to a Council of War,⁵⁹ when your Sentiments on the following questions will be asked?

[1–2] Whether it will be prudent, in our present circumstances, and strength, to attempt by a general attack, to dislodge the Enemy; and if it is, and we unsuccessful, where we shall retreat to?

[3] If such an attack should not be thought eligible, what general disposition of the Army had best take place, till the Weather forces us from the Field?

[4] Where, and in what manner, supposing the Enemy to keep possession of Philadelphia, had the Continental Troops best be Cantoned after they can no longer keep the Field?

[5] What measures can be adopted to cover the Country near the City, and prevent the Enemy drawing Supplies therefrom, during the Winter?

[6] Will the Office of Inspector Genl. to our Army, for the purpose, principally, of establishing one uniform sett of Manœuvres and Manual, be adviseable as the time of the Adjutant Genl. seems to be totally engaged with other business?

[7] Should Regimental promotions extend only

59. The council of war was held on October 29. (See Washington's letter to the Council of War, Oct. 29, 1777, *post.*)

to Captns., Inclusively, or to that of the Majority?

[8] Will it be consistent with propriety and good policy to allow Soldiers the reward offered to others for apprehending Deserters?

[9] The Commissaries complaining of the number, and disproportion of the Ration's which are Issued to the Troops and at the sametime of the advanced price of all kinds of spirits, owing to the Imposition of the Sutlers upon the Soldiery what regulation, or remedy can be applied to rectify the one, and prevent the other? I am, etc.⁶⁰

COUNCIL OF WAR

Head Quarters at Whitpain, October 29, 1777.

His Excellency informed the Board, That the enemy's

60. When the council of war was convened (October 29) the questions here propounded and other matters were considered. To avoid repetition, on that date the answers of the council to the above queries are here given:

1. "It will not."

2. "Precluded by the above answer."

3. "The army should take post on the ground a little to our left, which has been reconnoitred and reported by the Engineers; and sufficient reinforcements should be sent to the Garrisons at Red-bank and Fort Mifflin to complete the number of, men requisite for their defence."

4. "Deferred."

5. "Deferred."

6. "Such an officer is adviseable. The manual manœuvres, or any regulations to be established, previously to be settled or agreed to by the Commander in chief or a board of officers, appointed by him for that purpose."

7. "Promotions should be regimental as high as Captains inclusively. All from that rank in the line of the state."

8. "The reward should be allowed to soldiers."

9. "Deferred." In a rough, undated draft of the proceedings of a council of general officers, filed at the end of October, 1777, and so recorded in the Varick Transcripts in the Library of Congress, this ninth question is answered: "The Commissaries should be directed to take all the Liquors in the hands of the Sutlers at a reasonable price, if they can agree, and if they cannot, the Sutlers are to

carry them away. No Sutler should be allowed to continue in the Army longer than the 5th day of November.”

This council also advised an exchange of prisoners, under several alternatives, and decided that no captain or subaltern was entitled to a horse, excepting captains of artillery in command of two field pieces, and captains in command of regiments which have no field officers.

(See Washington's letter to the council of war, Oct. 29, 1777, post.)

Sets of these queries, both signed by Washington, are in the Massachusetts Historical Society and the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. One, in the writing of Caleb Gibbs, is addressed to Knox; the other, in the writing of Hamilton, is addressed to Wayne.

whole force, according to the best estimate he could form, founded on general returns of their army, which had accidentally fallen into his hands bearing every mark of authenticity, and from probable calculations of such changes as may have happened since the date of them, amounted to about 10,000 rank and file, present fit for duty. That their main body by the last accounts were in and near Philadelphia. That they had established several batteries on Province Island, opposite to Fort Mifflin, from which, they continually annoyed the garrison there; but hitherto without any material effect. That they had on the 22d. instant attempted to carry red bank by storm; but were repulsed with considerable loss. That the day following several of their ships of war drew up against Fort Mifflin; which, in conjunction with their batteries before mentioned began a severe attack upon the fort; but were compelled to quit the enterprise and retire with loss. That however, notwithstanding the obstacles they encounter in the River obstructions, they have found means to open a communication with their ships by way of Tinicum Island.

He further informed them, That our whole force at this time amounted by the last returns to 8313 Continental troops and 2717 Militia, rank and file, present fit for duty. That besides these, were the garrisons at Fort Island and Redbank; the former consisting of about 300 Continental troops, the

latter 350; in addition to which a detachment of three hundred militia marched the 26th. to reinforce the two posts, also the troops on the other side the Schuylkill

in number about 500 Militia, under Brigadier General Potter.

That this force was likely soon to suffer a diminution of 1986 Militia, by the expiration of the terms of service for which those from Virginia and Maryland engaged.

That on the other hand, He had called upon the State of Pennsylvania in the strongest terms, to afford all the assistance and reinforcement in its power to this army; and that he had also written to Generals Dickinson, Foreman and Newcomb, pressing them in the most earnest manner, to endeavour to collect all the militia of the State of New Jersey, that can possibly be spared from other objects, in the neighbourhood of Red bank, as an additional aid and security to that post; but was uncertain what degree of success these different applications might have.

He finally informed them, that by advice from the Northward, it appeared that General Burgoyne and his whole Army had capitulated to General Gates, on condition of being permitted to return to Great Britain, and not bearing Arms again in North America during the present contest. That by a letter of the 25th. instant from General Dickinson, there was reason to believe, Sir Harry Clinton and the forces with him had returned down the North River; and that the troops heretofore stationed at Rhode Island were arrived at New York. That he was not able to afford any precise information of the disposition made by Generals Gates and Putnam, in consequence of the forementioned events; but had heard that General Gates had detached two Brigades to join Governor Clinton at Esopus.

Observing, that under these circumstances, he had called a Council to consult and resolve upon the measures best to be pursued; He accordingly requested the sentiments of the Gentlemen present, on the following subjects.

* * * * *83

83. The four queries here omitted are identical with the first four in Washington's Circular to the General Officers, Oct. 26, 1777, *q. v.*

Q: Can any, and what succours may with propriety be drawn from the Northern Armies at this time?⁸⁴

The deliberations on the foregoing subjects finished. The Commander in Chief proceeded to the following Questions.

* * * * *⁸⁵

84. "Succours should be drawn from the Northern armies to consist of twenty regiments, fifteen of Massachusetts, three of New Hampshire and Lee's and Jackson's regiments."

85. The four queries here omitted are the same as the last four in Washington's Circular to the General Officers, Oct. 26, 1777, *q. v.*

Q: Colo. Frazer, in a letter of the 9th. instant, having represented that he had "Liberty to mention it as Genl. Howe's earnest desire, that a general exchange of prisoners should take place on equitable terms, or that the officers prisoners of war on both sides should be released and have liberty to go to any place in possession of their friends on their paroles." What measures might it be proper for us to take⁸⁶ in consequence of that information?⁸⁷

86. "Deferred."

87. The proceedings of this council of war are in the writing of Alexander Hamilton and were signed by Jno. Sullivan, Nath. Greene, Adam Stephen, Marquis de Lafayette, Alex. McDougall, W. Smallwood, H. Knox, J. M. Varnum, Anty. Wayne, P. Muhlenberg, G. Weedon, Jed. Huntington, and T. Conway.

COUNCIL OF WAR³⁴

November 8, 1777.

His Excellency having informed the Council, of the Reinforcements that were expected from Peekskill and that among them was 1600 Militia from Massachusetts under General Warner,

34. The Council was composed of Maj. Gens. John Sullivan, Nathanael Greene, Marquis de Lafayette, and Alexander McDougall, Brig. Gens. William Maxwell, Henry Knox, Anthony Wayne, George Weedon, William Woodford, Charles Scott, Thomas Conway. Jedidiah Huntington, and William Irvine.

whose times would expire the last of November.

His Excellency informed the Council, that from a variety of circumstances he was of opinion, that the Enemy mean a formidable attack upon Fort Mifflin very soon, and desired their opinion whether under our present circumstances, as to Numbers &c, we could afford further assistance to the Forts than has been hitherto given, without endangering the Safety of this Army.

The following Question was put. Whether, in Case the Enemy should make an attack upon the Forts upon Delaware, it would be proper with our present Force to fall down and attack the Enemy in their Lines near Philadelphia?

Ansr. In the Negative unanimously.³⁵

35. In the writing of Tench Tilghman.

***CIRCULAR TO THE GENERAL OFFICERS**

December 3, 1777.

Sir: I wish to recall your attention to the important matter recommended to your consideration sometime ago; namely, the advisability of a Winters Campaign, and practicability of an attempt upon Philadelphia with the aid of a considerable body of Militia, to be assembled at an appointed time and place, particular reasons urge me to request your Sentiments on this matter by the Morning,

and I shall expect to receive them accordingly [in writing] by that time.⁹¹ I am, etc.⁹²

91. The opinions received in answer to this circular are dated December 3 and 4 and were practically unanimous against a winter campaign and an attack on Philadelphia. Two or three opinions were indecisive, and many of them branched off into a reconsideration of the question of winter quarters.

92. The words in brackets are in an unknown hand. The circular sent to Brig. Gen. Anthony Wayne is in the writing of John Fitzgerald and is in the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

***REMARKS ON PLAN OF FIELD OFFICERS FOR REMODELING THE ARMY⁸¹**

November, 1777.

To abolish Colonial distinctions, however desirable it may be, is next to impossible. Great pains in the early part of this war was used, in vain, to do this; but even in the New England States, where the Sentiments, and customs of the People have an exact semilarity, it was found impracticable.

The new modeling of the Army, and reducing supernumerary officers is a very desirable matter, and ought, if possible, to take place; but quaere, would not such a total change in our military system, as is proposed, occasion too great a convulsion? would not the number of rejected Officers promote discontent and disorder among the common Soldiery? nay even Mutiny and desertion.

The allowance of Land to the disbanded Officers may be proper enough, but will not half pay be attended with enormous expence? and would not this, and allowing half pay to the Officers of

reduced regiments at the end of the War, add such weight to a debt already, and probably will be, of such magnitude, as to sink the Colonies under the load of it; and give great disgust to the people at large?

81. Cols. Theodorick Bland, Mordecai Gist, Josias Carvil Hall, Thomas Hartley, and Robert Lawson; Lieut. Col. James Innis and Majs. John Taylor and Henry Miller signed a letter to the Commander in Chief, inclosing a 10-page opinion on the “proposed New Establishment and regulations of the Army,” which is filed with the above Remarks in the *Washington Papers*. A rejoinder of the field officers to Washington's “Remarks,” dated by Washington, November, 1777, is also filed in the *Washington Papers* in the Library of Congress.

To THE GENERAL OFFICERS

Head Quarters, April 20, 1778.

QUESTIONS FOR THE CONSIDERATION OF THE GENERAL OFFICERS

There seem to but three general plans of

operation, which may be premeditated for the next Campaign: one the attempting to recover Philadelphia and destroy the enemy's army there: another the endeavouring to transfer the war to the Northward, by an entreprize against New York, and a third the remaining quiet, in a secure, fortified camp, discipling and arranging the army, 'till the enemy begin their operations, and then to govern ourselves accordingly; Which of these three plans shall we adopt?

If the first, what mode of execution shall we pursue, and what force will be requisite, estimating the present numbers of the enemy in Philadelphia at 10,000 men, exclusive of marines and seamen whose aid may be called in? Shall we endeavour to effect the purpose by storm, by regular approaches, or by blockade, and in what particular manner?

If the seconds, shall we attempt to take New York, by *a coup de main* , with a small force, or shall we collect a large force and make an attack in form ? In either case, what force will be necessary,

estimating the number of the enemy in and about New York at 4000 men, and what disposition shall we make so as to effect the enterprise, and, at the same time, to protect the country here and secure our stores?

If the last, what post shall we take, so as to keep the army, in a state of security, to afford cover to the country and to our magazines, and to be in a situation to counteract the future motions, of the enemy?⁷⁰

The Commander in Chief thinks it

70. In response to the above queries the various general officers submitted written opinions, which are in the *Washington Papers*. Wayne, Paterson, and Maxwell approved an attack on Philadelphia. Knox, Poor, Varnum, and Muhlenberg favored an attack on New York. Stirling favored both New York and Philadelphia. Lafayette, Steuben, and Duportail deemed any operation against the British inadvisable, but that the army should be strengthened and better trained. Greene concurred in this, but thought an attack on New York might be made and sketched out a general plan for the operation.

unnecessary to make any comments, on these questions, as the General officers, will, no doubt, fully weigh every circumstance proper to be considered, and sensible of the importance of the objects, to which their attention is called, will make their opinions the result of mature deliberation.⁷¹

71. Copy is in the writing of Alexander Hamilton.

On April 18 Congress resolved: "That General Washington be authorized and directed forthwith to convene a council, to consist of the major generals in the State of Pennsylvania, and the general officer commanding the corps of engineers, and with the advice of the said council to form such a plan for the general operations of the campaign as he shall deem consistent with the general welfare of these states: That Major Generals Gates and Mifflin, members of the Board of War, have leave

to attend the said council.” This resolve reached Washington's hands April 22, adding another to the occasions on which the Commander in Chief anticipated the officious action of Congress. On April 27 Congress authorized Washington to call the commander of the artillery to the council. It should be noted that General Knox had been included among those whose opinion was asked on the above questions.

In response to the resolve of April 18, Washington called another council for May 8. (See Council of War, May 8, 1778, *post.*)